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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001800

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/13/2005

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: AMBUSH ON LTTE LEADERS IN EASTERN SRI LANKA

Classified By: Charg d'Affaires James F. Entwistle. Reason:  
1.4(B,D)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: In Batticaloa district, in eastern Sri Lanka, on October 10, suspected Karuna faction gunmen, ambushed a convoy carrying the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) district military head and intelligence head. The attack reportedly left four dead and seven wounded. At the request of the LTTE Peace Secretariat, the government evacuated a seriously wounded LTTE fighter to Colombo. The attack is a reminder that, despite the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA), a shadow war continues in the east that has the potential to flare into a wider conflict, especially in the run-up to the November 17 presidential election. End Summary.

Bushwhacked

[12.](#) (SBU) On the night of October 10, a four vehicle convoy, stopped at an LTTE checkpoint in Vavunathivu, was attacked by suspected members of the breakaway LTTE Karuna faction. The resulting firefight lasted almost an hour according to some press reports. LTTE district military head Bhanu and district intelligence chief Keerthi were thought to be the targets of the attack. Local press reported four dead and seven injured, while the LTTE claimed only three wounded. The Sri Lankan Army (SLA) told the DAO that Keerthi may be among the dead or wounded although the Norwegians have told us that reports of Bhanu's death are erroneous. The attack took place in LTTE controlled territory but only 750 meters from an SLA checkpoint.

[13.](#) (C) Bhanu is a northern Tamil, and close confidant of LTTE leader Prabhakaran, selected by Prabhakaran to take over the eastern front after Karuna broke away in March 2004. Keerthi is from Batticaloa and is believed to be responsible for orchestrating the LTTE campaign against SLA intelligence operatives in the district.

Medevac

[14.](#) (U) At the request of the LTTE Peace Secretariat, the GSL arranged a helicopter to medevac an LTTE cadre seriously wounded in the firefight to Colombo for medical treatment. In 2005 there have been nine requests for medevac assistance, which are made via the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) to the GSL Peace Secretariat and then acted upon by the SLA or private services.

Comment

[15.](#) (C) Details remain murky although it is logical to assume that the breakaway Karuna faction is behind the incident (and they claimed credit late on October 12). Bhanu and Keerthi are both close to Prabhakaran and it is thus unlikely that this attack will not elicit some sort of response from LTTE headquarters - an unwelcome prospect in the always volatile East in the run-up to the November 17 Presidential election. ENTWISTLE